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Between Social Control and Popular Power: The Circulation of Private Guns and Control Policies during the mid to late Qing, 1781-1911

Lei Duan*

ABSTRACT

The Qing government promulgated the new version of the criminal law in 1910, which, unlike the Great Qing Code, loosened the state's grip on private firearms, proposing that any ordinary individuals were permitted to own either bird guns or foreign guns for self-defense purpose as long as they had their weapons registered. This article examines the manifold ways in which the Qing state was gradually impotent to maintain the monopoly of violence and made an adjustment to the new social and political situation. Before the promulgation of this law, most ordinary people were strictly forbidden to carry bird guns. Only a small number of people were allowed to be armed with less sophisticated guns, which not only would not challenge the state authority, but also assisted the state to maintain local order. In the midst of the late Qing chaotic social and political order and the pouring of foreign weapons, the government found it difficult to restrict the diffusion of firearms in local society. The officials gradually recognized the potential of armed civilians in its efforts to combat rebels. This paper argues that the Qing's policy on private weapons was determined by the stance between two ideologies: the reliance on social power to defend the localities, and the resolute maintenance of their monopoly of the deadliest forms of weapons. The state's regulation and control over its armed civilians appeared as a dynamic process, hovering between the two ideologies until the end of the dynasty.

Keywords: Qing dynasty, bird guns, foreign guns, arms control

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I. INTRODUCTION

On February 29, 1908, Shen Jiaben (1840-1913), a prominent jurist and legal reformer of the late Qing Dynasty, presented the throne with a draft version of the criminal code called the Current Criminal Law of the Great Qing (Da Qing xianxing xinglü). The new legal code was officially promulgated in 1910, just one year before the overthrow of the Qing court. As a crucial part of the new policies reform (xinzheng, 1901-1911) initiated by the Qing court to revitalize the fragile government after the continuous domestic uprising and humiliating foreign invasion, the radical revision of the traditional legal code aimed to build a modern and independent judicial system inspired by Western and Japanese models. One prominent revision that marked a departure from traditional criminal legal practice was the statute on private possession of weapons. Unlike the Great Qing Code (Daqing lüli), which strictly prohibited most common people from possessing firearms, the new criminal law loosened the state's grip on private firearms, proposing that ordinary individuals were permitted to own guns for self-defense purposes as long as they had their weapons registered.[1]

For the first time in Chinese history, the criminal code removed the prior law provision that only those living in the remote mountainous and coastal regions could carry firearms, but under strict surveillance. The state officially loosened harsh restrictions on gun ownership. This radical change indicated judicial reformers of the late Qing adjusted their reform agenda to the new social situation. As Shen Jiaben and his colleagues explained in the statutes, "Right now most bandits and robbers can obtain guns, and ordinary people are not capable of effectively defending themselves without arming with equally lethal firearms . . ..Thus, all people should henceforth be permitted to carry foreign guns (breech-loading firearms) or bird guns (black-powder muzzle-loading matchlock firearms) for self-defense."[2] If the tranquil social order during the High Qing period (from about 1680 to the late eighteenth century) allowed the government to maintain its monopoly over advanced weapons, the late Qing would present an entirely different scene: the general social turmoil accompanying the prevalence of private guns in local society helped shift the government away from clining to its monopoly on guns.

The Qing government never launched a national program of firearm registration as many modern states did. The absence of such statistics in the Qing dynasty makes any estimation of the level of firearm dissemination tentative. However, it is clear that as accelerating domestic rebellions, protracted military conflicts, and the process of local militarization dominated the decades of the 1850s and after, the circulation of firearms among non-state actors increased. The Taiping rebellion, arguably the most destructive peasant insurrection in human history to that time, kicked off successive popular uprisings in the late nineteenth century, in which the rebels armed themselves with a mixture of obsolete Chinese weapons and imported Western firearms against the Qing troops. The chaotic social order, by consequence,

1 According to the Great Qing Code, the Qing government permitted three groups of people to carry bird guns. People living in the dangerous mountains and valleys were eligible to own firearm against wild beast; people living along the coast could use gun to protect themselves against pirates; ordinary individuals who lived in Gansu and Shanxi provinces were allowed to use gun because the regions were figured by tense ethnic conflicts. See *The Great Qing Code*, trans. William C. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 205-206.

2 Shen Jiaben, *Current Criminal Law of Great Qing* (Current criminal law of the great Qing), *juan* 25: 24.

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led to a proliferation of local militia or other forms of self-defense forces in local society. Village-based militias (tuanlian), for instance, organized by local gentry, learned to use modern guns or rifles manufactured by foreign countries against potential threats. The presence of armed militia, however, failed to make society safer. Local Gazetteers and newspapers were filled with gun-provoked violence or lurid reports of armed banditry. The diffusion of firearms in local society thus not only deteriorated social and political stability in the late Qing, but also spurred more ordinary people to pursue comparable or more powerful weapons for self-defense. Village elites too, who had enhanced their status through the holding of degrees, started exercising their powers through the procurement of guns in their functions in local defense.[3] The government's gradually increasing impotence to maintain social order and its exclusive authority over powerful weapons made Hu Xueyan (1823-1885), a notable businessman of the late nineteenth century lament that "Wouldn't it be foolish for the government to stamp out civilians' guns, if it was incapable of banning outlaws or bandits' guns?"[4]

This article traces the dynamic process through which the state adjusted its stance towards private weapon ownership in accordance with the changing social and political reality during the mid to late Qing periods. Previous studies have examined thoroughly both military logistics in the High Qing period and the late Qing's military transformation efforts, with their research focus on weapon use in military operations. Nevertheless, the issue of how the possession of powerful guns by non-state actors generated social and political implications remains unclear. As my research proves, the military use of these weapons during the Qing period had been very much interwoven into the broader social fabric, forcing the state to take steps to maintain the monopoly on violence. Shen Jiaben's memorial frames the major questions asked in this chapter. First, what were continuities and changes of firearm control policies from the mid to the late Qing? Second, how did social ecology, geography, political considerations, and other factors help shape the circulation mechanisms of civilian guns? Third, how did private gun ownership affect the relationship between state and society?

Drawing on both central government documents and local sources, this chapter introduces the manifold ways in which the state was increasingly unable to maintain its monopoly on violence. Its novel approach was to adjust to the new social and political reality. This article argues that the private gun's diffusion in local society, to a large extent, was determined by the state's stance between two ideologies: the reliance on social power to defend the localities, and the resolute maintenance of their monopoly on the most advanced weapons. The state's regulation and control over its armed civilians appeared as a dynamic process, hovering between the two ideologies until the end of the Qing dynasty.

3 For example, the Qian faily of Wuxi City, a great literary elite lineage in the Jiangnan region, wastered little time to purchase foeign guns and trained local people to use them in the early twentieth century. See Jerry Dennerline, *Qian Mu and the World of Seven Mansions* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1988), 71-73.

4 Hu Xueyan, *Hu wenzhong* quanji (Collections of Hu Wenzhong's books), *juan* 55:3.

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II. THE INTRODUCTION OF MATCHLOCK (BIRD GUN) IN MING-QING CHINA

A. *The Diffusion of the Matchlock Guns into Chinese Society*

Notwithstanding the predominance of the pacifistic value in Chinese tradition, the presence of weapons among civilians was not uncommon in China's history. Civilian weapons before the late Qing period were mostly made from cold steels and other easy accessible materials. Long before the eighteenth century, the Ming and early Qing governments rarely took serious efforts to measure the degree of civilian weapon ownership. State intervention on the possession of private weapons happened only when offenders used lethal arms to conduct crimes or rebellious activities. However, with the diffusion of the matchlock gun, the government consciously tightened its control over the civilian weapons, taking deliberate measures to minimize the potential threat to political stability brought about by the large numbers of unregulated guns in society, whose prowess equaled or even exceeded those of military weapons.

The matchlock gun's first landing in China can be dated back to the Jiajing period (ruled 1521-1567) of the Ming dynasty in the early sixteenth century. When the exotic weapon crossed the sea, Chinese gave this black-powder muzzle-loading matchlock weapon a special name, the "bird gun" or "fowling piece" (niaoqiang).[5]Although the introduction of firearms had radically transformed the way of fighting, the matchlock or bird gun was never adopted as the predominant weapon during the Ming and Qing periods.[6] The state's indifference towards small arms not only affected the degree of its circulation in society, but also prevented the civilians upgrading their weapons. Banditry, insurgency, and other forms of rebellious activities are indispensable to measure the spread of arms among the population. This is not only because the armed activities always drew official attention and entered into the historical record in many forms, but also these restless individuals and groups were always at pains to acquire the most advanced weapons for violent purposes. During the Qing dynasty, bird guns and other firearms were not common among outlaws, bandits, and rebels as they were in modern period. For example, the Conspectus of Penal Cases (Xing'an huilan), the largest collection of Qing criminal cases serving as legal guide for local magistrates, involved few bird gun homicide cases before the nineteenth century. The criminals with lethal purposes always used sword, knife, daggers, and other nonexplosive weapons.[7] The Lin Shuangwen uprising (1786-1788) was another prime example to look into how the rebel force, which was composed largely of Ming loyalists and peasants, equipped the rebel army against Qing troops. In the early 1780s, Lin joined the Heaven and Earth Society (tiandihui), which was characterized as both a secretive folk religious sect and a criminal organization in Taiwan.[8] Within a short time, the secret society, organized by Lin grew to some 50,000 men, many of whom were former

5 F. Mayers, "On the Introduction and Use of Gunpowder and Firearms among the Chinese," *Journal of the North China Branch Royal Asiatic Socety*, 6 (1871), 93-103.

6 See Ulrich Theobald, *War Finance and Logistics in Late Imperial China: A Study of the Second Jinchuan Campaign (1771-1776)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 77-83.

7 See Zhu Yunqi et al., *Xing'an Huilan sabian* (Conspectus of penal cases) (Reprint, Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 2000).

8 Dian Murray, *The Origin of the Tiandihui: The Chinese Triads in Legend and History*, in collaboration with Qin Baoqi, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

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Ming loyalists, peasants (mostly unattached single men), and local bullies.[9] In 1786, Lin's followers with anti-Qing resentments started a rebellion and occupied most of Taiwan within a short time period. However, these insurgents were quickly suppressed by the government in 1786, mainly owing to the Qing's well equipped and disciplined troops. According to a memorial presented by Li Shiyao (?- 1788), the governor-general of Fujian and Zhejiang, the government deployed 8,468 bird guns and many other weapons for the suppression.[10] In comparison, the insurgents were mostly armed with sword, knife, arrow, and spear. Although some of them obtained bird guns and other firearms, these weapons were in short supply for fighting against well-equipped Qing armies. This case suggests that the qualitative gap in weapon technologies between the Qing troops and rebels in local society was still insurmountable. These armed rebels, though ferocious and militaristic in nature, did not shift away the state monopoly on advanced weapons.

The foremost reason for bird gun's relatively low degree of circulation at the time certainly, lies in the restrictive bird gun control policies which stemmed from the government's suspicion over the use of powerful weapons by non-military individuals. In the meantime, the diffusion of bird guns in society before the late nineteenth century was highly uneven, depending on local ecological situation and the accessibility of bird gun sources. This was particularly true in some regions where outlaws were less rampant, and civilians' armed self-defense was needless. In such areas, gun-related cases rarely appeared in the local magistrate's archives. As Susan Naquin in her research on eighteenth- century Shandong has suggested, the ordinary people's indifference towards powerful weapons was due partially to "the existence of the civil order [in eighteenth- century China] that made self-defense unnecessary."[11] Naquin's argument may have been valid in Northern China or prosperous Jiangnan regions, which, according to William Skinner, was garrisoned well by the Green Standard soldiers.[12] This view, however, naturally tends to minimize regional differences, assuming an unconditional judgment that bird gun ownership was not common elsewhere.

Depending on geographic location and social conditions, regions differed greatly in how readily the bird gun circulated among civilians during most of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Considerable empirical evidence suggests that carrying bird gun was by no means a marginal activity to ordinary people in violence-prone regions. Rather, the use of the bird gun became an integral part of local social life in some coastal provinces. In such areas where gentry's activity was either weak or absent and the state was unable to provide sufficient support, ordinary people were more likely to own firearms, especially the bird guns to protect themselves from becoming victims of banditry. William Rowe's recent research on Macheng a county in northeastern Hubei province which was notorious for endemic banditry, reveals that European-style muskets appeared among civilians in large numbers at least during the

9 David Ownby, "Chinese Hui and the Early Modern Social Order: Evidence from Eighteenth-Century Southeast China," in Robert J. Antony, ed., *"Secret Societies" Reconsidered: Perspectives on the Social History of Modern South China and Southeast Asia*, (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 52-53.

10 *Tiandihui* (The Heaven and Earth Society) (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 1980-88), vol. 3: 51.

11 Susan Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 24.

12 William G. Skinner, "Social Ecology and the Forces of Repression in North China: A Regional-Systems Framework for Analysis," Unpublished paper, 1979.

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seventeenth century.[13] The use of bird guns was also continuously reported in many feud-afflicted areas of coastal provinces. For example, owing to scarce resources, expanding population, and unstable social ecology, constant lineage feuding became endemic in Fujian and Guangdong provinces. Zhang Jixin (1800-1878), the prefecture governor of Tingzhanglong in Fujian province, noted in 1842 that bird guns were widely used in lineage feud strife in southern Fujian. He claimed that bird guns and many other firearms had been used for a long time in these feud-prone regions.[14]

People living along the Southeast Coast and borderland had predated other inland people to encounter the weapon. Bird gun amateurs before the late Qing were mostly anonymous peasants, who armed themselves for hunting, self-defense, or even committing violence, left virtually no written records available. Nevertheless, clues about the civilians' use of firearms could be obtained from contemporary eyewitness descriptions. The famous Cantonese scholar Qu Dajun (1630-1696), writing in the early Qing dynasty, noted that "bird guns were commonly found in Guangdong. In the hill areas, men learned to use them from the age of ten, and Xinhui County was known for making them."[15] Existing related documents did not uncover how the Guangdongese people came to learn the gun technique originally. What has been confirmed is that by Qu's time, Southern Guangdong, in comparison with other Chinese regions, had more opportunities to come into contact with the outside world, given its geographic adjacency to Macao, which had been under Portuguese control since the mid-sixteenth century. Thereafter, Macao not only displayed its pivotal position as the hub of Asian trade before the late Qing, but also served as a conduit, through which some Chinese people living in the Pearl River Delta could witness product innovation in the West, including cannon and quick-firing guns.[16] Firearm trafficking and gunrunning in Macao along with their impact on social order, despite appeared sporadically, always elicited a great deal of official attention during the Qing dynasty. Recent research by Par Kristoffer Cassel suggests that the Qing government only claimed jurisdiction "in cases where Chinese had been killed by foreigners."[17] Such pluralistic legal order prevented Chinese governments from suppressing gun-running activities in foreign settlements, through which foreign weapons found their way into Chinese coastal regions.

Nor were bird guns in China ever exclusively smuggled from Macao and other coastal areas. Rather, private guns scattered in societies for the most part were locally produced. Bird gun became a favored weapon in some violent-prone regions because it was relatively easy to make without less sophisti-

13 William Rowe, *Crimson Rain, Seven Centuries of Violence in a Chinese County* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 338. According to Rowe, the bird gun's diffusion to the Macheng region was probably affected by local people who served in the military service and learned the gun crafting technique.

14 Zhang Jixin, *Dao Xian huanhai jianwenlu* (Officials' working documents during the Daoguan and Xiafeng's reigns) (Reprint, Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 1981), *juan* 91, 94-95.

15 Qu Dajun, *Guangdong Xinyu* (New words on Guangdong) (Reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1998), 441.

16 Portuguese adventurer Antonio Fialho Fereira, who travelled to Macau in 1640, noted that "a great quantity of powder, many matchlocks, and arquebuses, which likewise made there, and are sold very cheaply albeit that they are amongst the best in the world." See Richard J. Garrett, *The Defences of Macau: Forts, Ships and Weapons over 450 years* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010); Zhidong Hao. *Macau History and Society* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011).

17 Par Kristoffer Cassel, *Grounds of Judgement: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Power in Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 42.

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cated techniques. In a period marked by "esteeming literacy while despising martiality" (zhong wen qing wu), bird gun owners were traditionally either illiterate or semi-literate, including hunters, peasants, or other outlaws. It can be assumed that the construction method was not complicated, and could be transmitted through oral narratives. Given the government's monopoly on the manufacture of any types of firearms, it remains unknown in what exact ways that the details of bird gun technology got diffused. As suggested above, the Ming government carried out the "status system" strictly, under which the artisans in state arsenals were constantly and closely monitored. The system became loose after the sixteenth century, which was ultimately abolished by the Yongzheng emperor. One criminal case filed in the Xingan huilan, reveal that Wang Si, a native inhabitant of Beijing, worked for an iron shop to manufacture bird guns for the state arsenal. He took this occasion to sell numerous bird guns to his neighbors and instructed them to make firearms privately.[18] Once these artisans were no longer under tight control, as Wang Si's case shows, it was entirely possible that these artisans served as one courier in transmitting gun making techniques. By the end of the nineteenth century, bird gun was not regarded as an exotic import, but rather a weapon that could be forged indigenously, though its diffusion was not prevalent nationwide.

B. *Disarming Civilians: Bird Gun Control during the Qing Dynasty*

As addressed above, the Ming government did not place severe restraints on the civilian possession of cold steel weapons, mainly because the state had the capability, resources, and confidence in maintaining its monopoly on power and violence. However, the state's policy towards civilian possession of arms, especially bird guns began to present a different episode during the Qing period. As aliens, the Qing emperors were deeply distrustful of Han Chinese, which prompted them to ensure that elite Manchu forces had better weapons than Chinese soldiers. During the Qing period, the type of gun that qualified individuals carried was determined by their political status. The Qing emperors were by no means insulated from the changes in gun technology initiated in the West. As suggested by the Qing's royal collections, the Qing emperors, being aware of the rapid development of gun technology in Western Europe, deliberately monopolized the use of flintlock muskets for royal use exclusively from the seventeenth century.[19] With respect to the guns for military use, the allocation was highly hierarchical. Recent work by Ulrich Theobald and Yingcong Dai on the Qing's war expenditure and logistics suggest that the eight banner garrisons which were stationed at the capital, were allowed to be armed with the most advanced bird guns to guard the emperor and his noble family. What followed were other Manchu banner soldiers scattered among local provinces, who armed with less powerful guns. The last category was the Green Standard Troops, who were poorly equipped with obsolete matchlocks.[20] Though the elite Manchu forces relied primarily

18 Zhu Qingqi, *Xingan huilan* (Conspectus of penal cases) (Reprint, Beijing: Zhongguo zhengfa daxue chubanshe, 1987), 225.

19 For a list of the flintlock muskets collected by the Qing emperors, see http://www.dpm.org.cn/search/shuziziliaoguan/cangpin/common/search.html?A.objName%20like%27%25%E6%9E%AA%25%27%20.

20 Theobald, *War Finance and Logistics in Late Imperial China*, 44; Yingchong Dai, "Military Finance of the High Qing Period: An Overview," in Nicola di Cosmo, ed., *Military Culture in Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 306.

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on mounted archery, as addressed above, they still made efforts to retain their exclusive rights over the most sophisticated and developed military equipment.

Just as the cautious policy on bird gun in military use, the control of bird guns among civilians became an inseparable aspect of the Manchu rulership that guaranteed its legitimate power over Chinese subjects. The Qing rulers, for the most part, granted people the right to arm themselves with civilian weapons. Nevertheless, the definition of "civilian weapon" during the Qing was subjected to change over time. As the Manchus entered the Great Wall in 1644 and settled down in China proper, the alien rulers learned the lessons passed down by the Ming dynasty. Having witnessed the rise of a highly militarized population in the areas like the northwest, where armed peasants on many occasions joined rebel armies, the early Qing rulers soon banned any non-military individuals from possessing weapons. In 1648, the Board of War ordered the local magistrate to confiscate all kinds of weapons owned by peasants. In the meantime, the state placed people under surveillance with the adoption of the bao-jia system. Under the community-based system, village residents were under tightening administrative control. The chief of each bao unit was responsible for reporting any private weapons to local government in his jurisdiction.[21]

The early Qing's policy with respect to private arms reflected the anxieties of alien conquerors especially when their attempts to establish solid control could be hindered by a highly militarized population. The policy did not last long, as less than a year later it had been replaced by a new order, requiring local magistrates to return all the confiscated weapons to their owners and also ensured their rights to possess them.

> "Recently we have heard that the people have no weapons and cannot repel aggressors. Bandits on the other hand can profit, and the good people have to endure bitter and poisonous [misfortunes]. Now we think that the weapons and armor which the people originally ought not to have had, and which were strictly forbidden in the past, such as muskets, fowling pieces, bows and arrows, knives, spears, and horses, ought now to be retained in their possession and not forbidden. Return to their original owners those [weapons] which were initially turned over to the officials."[22]

This imperial edict issued in the sixth year of Shunzhi's reign (1644-1661) indicated the state's stance over private procession of weapons changed greatly from what it had envisioned. One striking difference was the Qing government's definition of civilian weapons, which included not only cold steel weapons as formulated during the Ming period, but also bird guns. The order also distinguished the "good people," from "bandits." The former group which belonged to the bao-jia units were again granted the right to own guns for self-defense.

Thereafter, the state did not place any particular restriction on the proper use of the bird guns, but regarded putting some kinds of weapons in the hands of peasants as a potential way to guard the localities against bandits and potential rebels. Such stance rested on two assumptions. First, when local peasants armed themselves with bird guns, they had power to deter or fight against bandits, whose weapons were much weaker. Second, these peasants who received proper military training had no chance to join the bandits

21 *Wenxian congbian* (Historical documents) (Reprint, Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2008), vol. 23, 485.

22 *Shizu shilu* (Veritable Records of Shunzhi emperor), *juan* 43: 505a. For the translation of this edict, see Frederic Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), vol. 2, 712.

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against the state. These two assumptions, however, became the Qianlong emperor (ruled 1735-1796)'s major worries years later. This is shown in an edict issued by him in 1777. In this year, Guotai (??-1872) , the governor of Shandong province and one of Qianlong's most favorite officials, presented a memorial to the emperor, requesting the emperor's approval to train village braves with bird gun shooting for collective defense. Qianlong rejected his request by arguing that

> "The village braves were used to arrest robbers and bandits, and guard local barns. They were supposed to assist regular troops and played similar roles. However, they were ordinary peasants, and possessed many different characters from soldiers. If they became skilled at shooting with bird guns, and then conducted illegal activities, that would be disastrous for local society. . . For instance, if Wang Lun and his followers mastered bird guns, we would not suppress them so easily."[23]

Why did the Qianlong emperor issue an order radically departing from the policy adopted by the Shunzhi Emperor, who regarded arming the common people as an effective way to repel bandits? The Wang Lun rebellion, as Qianlong mentioned in this edict, made the emperor reexamine Qing policy on the use of bird guns among peasants. Wang Lun was the leader of the White Lotus in Shandong Province. As a sect master skilled in meditating and healing, he quickly gathered several thousand followers and rebelled in 1774, to create a religious community. After successfully occupying several cities of Shandong, the insurgents were suppressed by the well-equipped Qing defenses within a month.[24] After the insurgents were suppressed, General Shuhede (1710-1777), who was in charge of the suppression, wrote a memorial to Qianlong:

> "The quick suppression of Wang Lun Uprising not only benefited from the brave and skillful warriors in the battle, but also due to the factor that insurgents were poorly equipped. Most of them were not armed with bird guns. It thus could be argued that the possession of bird guns mattered a lot and deserved our attention. If we do not take steps to prohibit the private guns, I am worried it may incur serious influence in the future. I think all the merchants and peasants should not be allowed to own guns. Local magistrate should confiscate all the bird guns in their jurisdictions. . .. In so doing, there will be no illegal bird guns in local society, which will avoid rebellious activities in a long run."[25]

Shuhede in his edict presented his anxiety over the potential threat by the bird gun owners in local society. In 1781, the forty-sixth year of Qianlong's reign, the emperor approved Shuhede's suggestion and issued an imperial edict forbidding the private manufacture of bird guns. He proclaimed that:

> "The private manufacture of bird guns in local society has always been a prohibited behavior for ordinary civilians. Provincial Commanders (dufu), however, did not take this issue into serious consideration in their daily affairs, leading to the emergence of this phenomenon. As a result, some outlaws might take this occasion to conduct illegal activities, rather than using gun for self-defense purpose or weeding out the wicked criminals. Thus, I order all provincial commanders to investigate this issue in your jurisdiction to guarantee that no artisans manufactures or sells bird guns. If private possession of bird guns is detected, their guns should be confiscated. Provincial commanders also need to report all the cases to the emperor annually."[26]

Qianlong's edict shows his genuine concern over the prevalence and ready availability of bird guns in local society and their threat to public security. After the year Qianlong issued the edict, provincial commanders continu-

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23 *Gaozongshilu* (Veritable Records of Qianlong emperor), *juan* 1727, fol: 23a-23b.

24 For a detailed analysis of the Wang Lun rebellion, see Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion.*

25 *Qianlong chao hanwen zhupi zouzhe* (Imperial edicts of the Qianlong emperor), Catalogue no. 555/10-24, First Historical Archives, Beijing.

26 *Qing Gaozong Shilu* (Imperial edicts of the Qianlong emperor), *juan* 11: 44.

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ously sent memorials to the emperors, reporting how the bird gun regulation policy was implemented, regardless of whether any private guns were detected in their respective jurisdiction. For the most part, local magistrates always asked the chief of each bao-jia unit to report any bird guns found in their jurisdictions. For the confiscated bird guns, local government would pay a minimum amount of money to their owners. They also notified local artisans that making bird guns was prohibited. According to the annual statistics reported by provincial governors through the palace memorial system, more than forty-four thousand bird guns were confiscated from the forty-sixth year to fifty-ninetieth year of Qianlong's reign.[27]

Under Qianlong's order, the ordinary people were deprived of the right of self-defense with bird guns. The Wang Lun Uprising set off an alarm about the danger of the existence of armed populace in local society. The 1781 edict on bird gun control not only indicated the government's firm intent to guard its monopoly on the production and distribution of powerful weapons, but also reflected the rulers' anxiety when encountering a militarized population who had potential against his legitimate control. As shown above, the state's stance towards private possession of bird gun was by no means stationary but a dynamic process, which was contingent on the social situation and political deliberation.

IV. THE INTRODUCTION OF FOREIGN GUNS IN LATE QING

In the early nineteenth century, the Qing dynasty entered into a period of decline as China suffered from both Western imperialist penetration and domestic unrest. For many late Qing elites, China's vulnerability to foreign invasion from the 1840s onwards was viewed in terms of the tremendous gap in weapon power between China and that of the West. As the ruling elites realized the need to modernize China's defense industry, many non-state groups and even ordinary individuals started pursuing foreign guns or replacing their outmoded bird guns with modern ones for purposes of self-defense or committing violence. As it turned out, the political decentralization and the chaotic social order in the late Qing made it impossible for the government to enforce the strict gun control laws, which in turn allowed the government to reexamine its stance towards private gun ownership in the new social situation.

A. *Orthodox and Heterodox Camps: the Circulation of Foreign Guns in Local Society*

As some reform-minded officials vigorously implemented military reform, the state's monopoly over the most advanced weapons, of which the imperial government used to be proud began to be loosened after the mid-nineteenth century. As China became gradually integrated into the global arms network, some modern firearms either imported from abroad or manufactured domestically were by no means found nowhere in local society. In Eastern Guangdong for instance, which was famous for its frequent lineage and vil-

27 I have collected and read these annual reports, which included the amounts of bird guns local government confiscated from 1782 to 1787. The statistics is based on the information provided by provincial governors. Chinese historian Zuo Buqing also includes the figure in the research on Qianlong's local control mechanism. See Zuo Buqing, "Qianlong zhenya wanglun qiyihou de fangmin cuoshi (Qianlong emperor's policy on suppressing peasant rebellion)," *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 2(1982): 29-69.

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lage feuds, local inhabitants quickly adopted Western-type rifles, which were brought in from nearby Hong Kong or Macao in committing communal violence.[28] The presence of the foreign gun was gradually not regarded as a novelty in some urban areas as well. One prominent example was the armed escort companies, known as biaoju, which had developed during the Ming and Qing dynasties to provide security services for wealthy individuals and merchant caravans. By the end of the nineteenth century, Beijing dwellers were accustomed to seeing these escorts, who were also expert martial artists, wandering in the street with foreign guns in hands.[29] Serious offenders like bandits or rebels with intent to injure others, too acquired guns actively to facilitate crime. Late Qing officials were well aware of the potential threat posed by these illegal gun owners. Gun shooting was not an item to be tested in imperial military examination from Qianlong's reign onward. The frequent report on the armed banditry allowed the naval commander Zhang Peilun (1848-1903) to comment, "if offenders have armed themselves with foreign guns, can the military candidates (wusheng) who were just adept at bow and arrow beat them?"[30]

Apart from regular troops and the modern police forces, gun carriers during the late Qing were comprised of a variety of people, including but not limited to gentry-led militia forces, ordinary peasants, urban dwells, rebels, and bandits. It is also difficult to figure out which types of guns that these people carried. When gun-involved violence appeared in late Qing newspapers or government document, the brand or other details of the weapons were seldom identified; rather they were roughly classified into "native" (tu) or "foreign" (yang). The match-loading gun transferred from Japan during the Ming dynasty had already been localized, and was called the bird gun or local gun (tuqiang), while the new Western gun was given the prefix "foreign" yang, which served to denote their superiority over the traditional ones. However, as Sherman Cochran suggests, Chinese people's distinction between "Chinese" and "Western" was very broad and inexplicit.[31] Similarly, though some major modernizers like Li Hongzhang had an intimate knowledge of foreign weapons and their respective performance, most civilian gun carriers lacked such expertise, labeling them simply as general foreign guns, no matter their place of production.[32]

The emergence of armed forces in local society during the late nineteenth century confirmed what scholars like Philp Kuhn have characterized about the militarized nature of Chinese local society. As suggested by Kuhn, the nineteenth-century militarization of local society "could be visible within both the orthodox, gentry-dominated Confucian culture and the various heterodox, secret-society dominated sectarian subcultures."[33] The village tuanlian militia, which was always tied with other militia nearby and developed into regional army embodied the orthodox side of militarization. Bandit

28 See Harry J. Lamley, "Lineage Feuding in Southern Fujian and Eastern Guangdong under Qing Rule," in Jonathan N. Lipman and Stevan Herrell, eds., *Violence in China: Essays in Culture and Counterculture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 27-64.

29 *Xunjingbu* (Police department), Catalogue no. 477-37-1-192, First Historical Archives, Beijing.

30 *Lishi wenxian* (Historical documents) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), 143.

31 Sherman Cochran, *Chinese Medicine Men: Consumer Culture in China and Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 161.

32 "Chouyi haifangzhe (On the coastal defense)," in *Li Hongzhang Quanji* (Collections of Li Hongzhang) (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2008), 161.

33 Kuhn, *Rebellion and its Enemies in Late Imperial China*, 165.

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bands, secret society, or "communities in arms" such as the Taiping rebel armies constituted the heterodox aspect of militarization. In a general sense, the primary distinction between the two modes of militarization is that militia forces had no intent to challenge state authority, though their existence objectively decentralized state power, while the latter behaved to disrupt social order and stability. Borrowing Kuhn's theoretical framework to categorize late Qing private gun ownership in the shadow of increasing militarization, it can be assumed that gun carriers could also be detected within both the orthodox and heterodox camps.

When massive social unrest, ranging from the unremitting popular movements, frequent banditry, to the foreign encroachments became chronic problems from the mid-nineteenth century, the Qing government's central authority and capability to maintain local order were gravely damaged. The endemic disorder once again allowed the state to reassess its policy of permitting certain groups, who would take up some police functions in local society to arm with powerful weapons. As the Taiping and Nian rebellions reached their climax in the 1860s, the government again emphasized the role of popular power in stabilizing social order, as exemplified by the local gentry-led private defense organizations.[34] Known as tuanlian or "grouping and drilling," the quasi-official armies and their other administrative functions in local society indicated the devolution of central power and the emergence of militarism, which allows scholars like Franz Michale to use "regionalism" to define late Qing's political structure.[35]

One of the tuanlian militia's distinct features compared with the Banner and Green Standard armies were the adoption of Western weapons. In the rural areas, tuanlian was mostly organized by influential local landlords, who were responsible for recruiting mercenaries, building fortifications, acquiring weapons, and training militia members to defend the localities. The tuanlian's private and semi-independent nature made the leaders more feasible to seek advanced weapons, as long as they received local magistrate approval. In the regions that had easy access to the weapon market and purchasing power, foreign guns were more likely to be adopted by tuanlian members. For example, in the early 1900s, gentry association of Guangdong's Xinning County wrote the local government demanding the approval of purchasing firearms for organizing militia. The request was promptly granted, allowing the militia leaders to purchase 1550 foreign guns from nearby Hong Kong. In the coastal provinces like Guangdong, the wealthy gentry probably had little difficulty in procuring foreign guns from Hong Kong and Macao. As Guangdong Governor Guo Songtao lamented in 1880, "foreign guns were sold without any restrictions."[36]

Militia forces also surged in newly emerging commercial cities like Shanghai, Suzhou, and Tianjin to preserve local peace in the crisis of war and social unrest. Following the footsteps of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps (shanghai shangtuan) which was established in 1853 to defend the Shanghai Interna-

34 See, Kwang-ching Liu and Richard J. Smith, "The Military Challenge: The North-west and the Coast," in John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu eds., *The Cambeidge History of China, vol. 11, Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 202-73.

35 Franz Michael, "Introduction: regionalism in nineteenth-century china," in Stanley Spector, *Li Hung-chang and the Huai Army: A Study in Nineteenth Century Chinese Regionalism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), xxi-xliii.

36 David Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineage in South China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 315.

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tional Settlement, Chinese merchants organized a militia in the city's Chinese district in 1907. The militia, as Elizabeth Perry and Bryna Goodman's works point out, substantially remedied the government's manpower shortage to quelled the opium den crisis (1910) and rice riots (1911).[37] The local government thus was not afraid to trust the militia with powerful arms. Once receiving permission from the governor-general of Liangjiang, Shanghai Daotai Cai Naihuang supplied the militia 120 "seven-nine" rifles and 5000 bullets, and also issued a license to purchase guns. As one memoir suggests, almost all the militia members had guns in hand on the militia's inception.[38] Almost simultaneously with Shanghai, Suzhou merchants Ni Kaiding and Hong Yulin organized the Suzhou Merchant Sports Association (Sushang tiyu hui), which was later evolved to the militia corps (Suzhou shangtuan). In early 1907, the Association was allowed to purchase 50 Mauser rifles and 10,000 bullets from Shanghai's foreign trade companies.[39]

The militia forces, the above mentioned armed escort companies, and ordinary armed civilians were overwhelmingly defensive in nature, whose gun ownership was visible to the government, while armed outlaws possessed utterly mobile and uncontrollable tendencies, posing explicable threats to social order and state power. The rebel forces, ranging from the tremendously destructive Taiping rebels to the heterodox secret societies and bandits, all actively showed their interest in purchasing or trafficking foreign weapons, though some of these groups were anti-foreign zealots. China during the latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed enormous social unrest and a string of insurgencies. Domestic rebellions of the Taiping, the Nian, the Muslims, and various kinds of secret societies spread across almost all of China. The primary motive of their actions was essentially to bring about radical changes in political and social spheres, while the foreign gun acquisition and possession could facilitate that end. For instance, when the Taiping Army reached Suzhou and Shanghai area in 1860, the military commander Li Xiucheng (1823-1864) was very taken with foreign guns and cannons. Though the major weapon-supplier countries adopted a neutral stance towards the Taiping and prohibited producers from selling military weapons to the army, Li was able to get his favored ammunition through an underground channel from Shanghai. As the North-China Herald noted in 1860:

> "[I]t may be scarcely credible to honest folk in Shanghai that during the whole time the firing was going on from the allied troops, Europeans from among us, one or two of then received as, at least, respectable persons, were actually engaged at various places up the two rivers selling the insurgents gunpowder and arms; the gunpowder under the name of, and packed like Chinese snuff!"[40]

A few years earlier, the Small Sword Society (xiaodaohui), a branch of the underground Heaven and Earth Society (tiandihui), staged an uprising and captured Shanghai in 1853. The rebel leaders took advantage of Shanghai's

37 Elizabeth J. Perry, *Patrolling the Revolution: Worker Militias, Citizenship, and the Modern Chinese State* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, inc., 2006), 30-31; Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai*, 1853-1937 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 204-205.

38 "Shanghai shangtuan guangfu shanghai jilue (History of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps)," in *Xinhai geming zai shanghai shiliao xuanji* (The 1911 Revolution in Shanghai) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1966), 145.

39 Xu Keke, "Jindai wuxi shangtuan de xingshuai ji shehui gongneng (Merchants' Corps in Modern Wuxi and its social function)," *Dangan yu jianshe* (Archives and Construction) 8(2005): 21.

40 "The Advance of the Taiping Insurgents on Shanghai," *The North-China Herald*, August 25, 1860, 34.

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position as a major port of weapon smuggling, acquiring flintlocks and gun powders from Western traffickers. In his memorial to the court, Viceroy of Liangjiang (covering the provinces of Jiangsu, Jiangxi, and Anhui) Yi Liang (1791-1867) expressed his deep anxiety regarding the rebel's acquisition of more advanced guns. "The ruffians bought brass caps and flintlocks from vicious Westerners. Without firing match and powder, these guns were not vulnerable to the rainy condition."[41] The rebels' adoption of foreign guns had promised to diminish Qing's military advantage. As Yi Liang depicted the battle scene, "when the rebels attack the city wall, their bullets, falling like rain, were a lot harder to avoid than shells, which caused a lot of injuries."[42] In the 1850s, most Chinese armies was still armed with a mixture of cold steels and inferior matchlocks. Whereas, the secret societies like the Small Sword Society were able to get some better arms, which increased the difficulty of suppression. The uprising had not been utterly subdued until two years later jointly by the Qing military and the Western powers. As we have seen above, one reason for Qianlong's quick suppression of the mid-Qing rebellions initiated by Wang Lun in Shandong and Lin Shuangwen in Taiwan during the eighteenth century laid in the fact that the weapons of regular troops were far superior to their antagonists. Comparatively, what can be drawn from the armed rebels of the late Qing is that the state's monopolistic position over advanced weapons began to dissolve. The late Qing's frequent ensuing receptiveness to foreign technology imports, including foreign firearms, added the complexity of the state's firearm control, which lasted until the fall of the dynasty in 1911.

If we scrutinize other forms of what the government proposed the heterodox camps of military force, the outlaws with no revolutionary agenda constituted another important category of firearms carrier. These outlaws were largely comprised of robbers spread through both urban and rural areas, Robin Hood-like gangsters hid in the mountainous regions, and some spontaneous or casual criminals who committed violence with pre-supposed motives. Like other agrarian societies, the activities of these outlaws became an imperative part of China's social ecology which ran through the whole Qing dynasty. In the criminal documents or other official written records, the government used the general term bandits (zei) to indicate their contemptible identities. These men and women, who depended on the use of violence to achieve their purposes, were typically eager to pursue the powerful weapons. Through their illicit activities, their weapon choice, and acquisition channels were shown, which provides particular perspective to gauge how military innovation penetrated into local society.

Even though there was no official statistics available on the firearm-related crime rate in Imperial China, instances of armed conflict were observed in many different textual forms. During the Qing dynasty, all the criminal cases were reported to and handled by the local magistrates first, who then reported some issues that were considered primary significance to the central bureaucracy.[43] After the death of one emperor, the annalists would organize

41 Shanghai shehui kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo (The Institute of History, Shanghai Academy of Social Science), *Shanghai Xiaodaohui qiyi shiliao huibian* (Historical documents on the Small Sword Society) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1980), 176.

42 Ibid., 177.

43 The ministry officials in the capital would send some representative ones to the emperor. Besides these regular memorials (known as *tiben*), the energetic emperors from Kangxi onward had increasingly used the "secret palace memorial" system to get across local informa-

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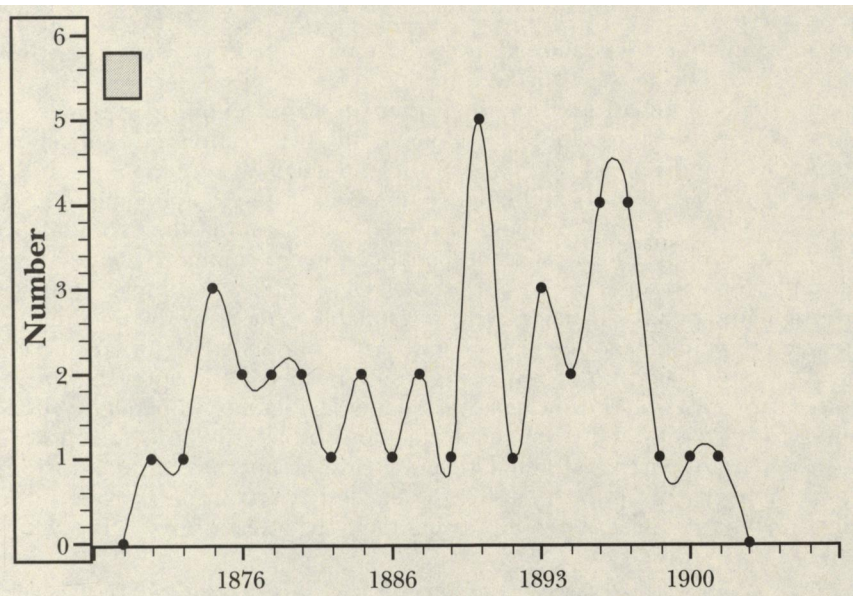
tons of memorials and edicts, including the ones related to violence and firearm-relate crime into chronological order, which were then published in the Veritable Records of the Qing (Qing Shilu). Most cases involving large-scale violence, armed conflict, or homicide were considered extremely serious incidents, which were required to be reported to the central government. The local officials, who were normally subject to multi-layer oversight were unlikely to hide the problems.[44] Certainly, these records were by no means completely comprehensive but represented a considerable amount of information about the gun-related cases nationwide through which the penetration of private guns and its social consequences might be assessed.[45]



The incidence of armed robbery and banditry gave an explicit indicator of the circulation of firearms in society. Several points emerge from this trending chart. First, among the heterodox groups, the bandits or robbers lagged behind in adopting advanced weapons. Before the 1860s, no criminal case involving the use of foreign gun was reported, whereas the insurgent forces like the Taipings or Small Sword Society had already acquired some sophisticated weapons from munition dealers. The diffusion of foreign weapons among bandits or robbers had occurred coincidentally with the Qing state's military modernization efforts. Second, from the 1860s onward, the number of criminal cases involving foreign guns far exceeded the number of bird-gun related crimes. Although the flow of the reported cases to the central bureaucracy was not huge, these cases to some extent indicate that aggressive outlaws exhibited a penchant for foreign-style arms. The proliferation and use of foreign guns by these outlaws after the 1860s exem-

tion from his inner circle of trusted officials, including local officials, inspecting censors, and even retired officials. See Silas Wu, *Communication and Imperial Control in China: Evolution of the Palace Memorial System, 1693-1735* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

44 Thomas M. Buoye, *Manslaughter, Markets, and Moral Economy: Violent Disputes Over Property in Eighteenth-century China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 239-240.

45 The records of gun-involved crimes are drawn from the *Daqing lichao shilu* (Veritable records of the great Qing) (Tokyo: Okura shuppan kabushiki kaisha, 1937-1938).

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plified what historians have argued about the endemicity of violence conflict in Chinese society, which was not limited to the major uprisings and rebellions.[46]

B. *The Unstable Relations between the State and Orthodox Armed Forces*

The foreign invasions and persistent civil unrest from the early nineteenth century appeared as the catalysts for the spread of Western firearms. The government found itself in a difficult position to restrict the heterodox camps from obtaining the powerful guns from an underground making and distribution network. As we have seen above, the fierce Taiping rebellion and the widespread peasant revolts which plagued the Qing Dynasty from the mid-nineteenth century allowed the government to delegate power to orthodox local elites who were encouraged to organize armed self-defense forces. One significant departure from the earlier strict control of firearms was that these collective defense forces were sanctioned to use firearms, either low-quality local guns or foreign guns, to defend their own interests when the state was unable to perform the police functions. These burgeoning militias, either gentry's rural tuanlian scattered throughout the country or Merchants' Volunteer Corps established in the major commercial cities, were all under official supervision. The Chinese term "guandu minban" (official oversight and popular management) was suitable to describe the relationship between the militia and the government. As mentioned above, the orthodox local elites who had no means to stockpile the needed weapons always resorted to local and provincial governments' assistance, who might either agree to borrow or sell them the surplus or obsolete firearms, or approve their request to purchase foreign weapons through intermediaries in foreign concessions. For example, in 1907, the Suzhou militia leaders wrote to the city's merchants' association, expressing their eagerness of practicing shooting in military drill.

> "Without practicing shooting with rifles, the militia must be deficient, nor could our spirit be kindled. . . Now some obsolete firearms, which were no longer used by the Army, sat idle in the Arsenal Bureau. These old guns would be adequate for the militia to drill. . . Only then could the merchant corps worthy of the name be established to protect the local community and public welfare."[47]

After deliberate consideration, the Jiangsu provincial government approved the militia leaders' request of borrowing forty-two quick rifles. Another similar organization in Wuxi, a major commercial hub adjacent to Suzhou, chose to purchase Mauser rifles and bullets from Shanghai's foreign corporation (yanghang), upon approval by the provincial government.[48]

Obviously, given the semi-independent nature of local genty-led militias, their acquisition of firearms was contingent on a host of social and political factors, including the affordability and accessibility to weapon sources, the necessity of advanced arms in defense determined by local governments, and the consistency of official sponsorship. First, like the bird gun's initial diffusion trajectory, the importance of geographic location in impacting foreign gun's circulation was remarkably illustrated by the new weapon's uneven distribution between the coastal and interior provinces, and between peaceful

46 Stevan Harrell, "Introduction," in *Violence in China*, 1-26.

47 "Suzhou tiyuhui binggao (Reports on the Suzhou Sports Association)," in *Suzhou Shanghui Dangan Huibian* (Historical documents on Suzhou Merchants' Association) (Wuhan: Bashu shushe, 2008), vol.4, 947.

48 Xu Keke, "Jindai wuxi shangtuan de xingshuai ji shehui gongneng."

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and violence-prone areas. As seen in cases mentioned above, wealthy regions or the areas with better access to weapon sources always spawned well-equipped militias and vice versa. A good example is the militia of Shawan, a township in southwestern Canton. By the early 1910s, as one internal document shows, the militia was equipped with fifty Mauser rifles (single-shot), seventy muti-shot rifles, thirty Mauser-type gingals, and ninety traditional bird guns or gingals.[49] At about the same time, some militias of North China took advantage of Tianjin's position as the area's primary gateway for the flow of foreign goods to purchase foreign arms. Local gentry of Zhili Province's Linyu County successfully raised money to purchase two hundred Mauser rifles and other small arms in Tianjin to arm the militia against constant banditry.[50] Comparatively, in some inland provinces, the relatively advanced weapons among militia troops hardly appeared in common use. One such case is that of the militia in Shangcai County of Henan Province. As the magistrate of this chronically poor county, Xu Shouzi (1852-1917) was deeply aware of the region's endemic banditry stemmed from disrupt social conditions. He advocated organizing highly trained militia by local gentry in each village against gangs of bandits. Regarding the weapon use, Xu approved the production of traditional bird guns or gingalls locally, while ignoring some local gentry's request of procuring more expensive foreign guns, for his was anxious about the financial burden incurred as a consequence of weapon acquisition.[51]

Second, we should also bear in mind that these gentry-led local militias were encouraged and mobilized only when the state had pressing need to maintain social order. That means the state viewed an armed militia as an extension of state power, while simultaneously being skeptical of such force. The milita's potential of thwarting centralization endeavors was not ignored by major statesmen. Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), for example, himself exhibited deep distrust of local gentry and indigenous forces. Rather, as Stephen MacKinnon points out, he was dedicated to training the New Army in Tianjin, fully employing a top-down initiative during the late decade of the Qing dynasty.[52] As many historians have evidently proved, the militarization of local society after the mid-nineteenth century was not persistent, as many militias were not supported by the government or dissolved naturally after the defeats of the Taiping and Nian in South China.[53] When the local order was harassed by the Boxers and foreign powers in the late 1890s, the Qing court's initiative of resolving the challenges paralleled what they had done in the 1850s and 1860s, through forming and training militias in North China to defend the country.

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49 Liu Zhiwei and Chen Chunsheng, "Qingmo minchu Guangdong xiangcun yipie (A glimpse of the rural society of Guangdong province in the late Qing and early Republican period)," in Bai Hua, ed., *Qingzhu Wang Zhonghan Xiansheng Bashiwu ji Wei Qingyun Xiansheng Qishi Huadan Jinian Lunwen Heji* (Essays to commemorate Wang Zhonghan and Wei Qingyun) (Anhui: Huangshan shuhe, 1999), 433-435.

50 "Juban Shangtuan (Establishing militia)," *Dagongbao*, January 25, 1910.

51 Xu Shouzi, *Xuezhi Shiduan* (Thoughts on Learning and Governance), reprinted in *Guangzhenshu jicheng* (Officials' documents of the Qing) (Anhui: Huangshan shushe, 1997), vol.9, 465-470.

52 Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Power and Politics in the Late Imperial China: Yuan Shi-kai in Beijing and Tianjin, 1901-1908* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 3-36.

53 Edward A. McCord, "Militia and Local Minimization in Late Qing and Early Republican China: The Case of Hunan," *Modern China* 2 :14 (1988), 156-187.

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The inconsistency of government policy and the lack of trust towards militia activity had prevented the popular forces from obtaining the equivalent weapons as the regular army units. The Qing state's attitude towards militia's weapons was explicitly expressed in the May 1899 imperial edict, which tended to restrict local militias' access to advanced firearms:

> "Recently, robbery has frequently been reported in many provinces. Thus the neighborhood mutual support is urgently required. With respect to the expenditure, all the localities should not create a burden to the common people. As for the weapons, the use of guns of new foreign type would not be recommended, if not under special circumstances. Other ordinary foreign guns and bullets are not necessary. Currently, local guns and traditional gunpowder are not uncommon in many inland provinces. They would provide effective defense against restless robbers?"[54]

The 1899 edict which directed local officials to deliberate on the issue of civilian weapons when mobilized people for local defense indicated that the state painstakingly sought to maintain its monopoly over the sophisticated weapons. Comparatively speaking, the late Qing government's stance over legitimate weapon ownership resembled its policy over bird guns during the Qianlong's reign, as the state adhered to the principle of holding advanced arms purposefully, although it delegated certain defense responsibilities to local power holders after the mid-nineteenth century. According to a Tianjin Dagongbao report in 1909, two years before the fall of the Qing, the Anhui provincial government rejected one local magistrate's request, which applied to purchase fifty breech loading rifles and plenty of bullets to arm the local militia. The provincial Bureau of Weapons explained that "these new-style guns were exclusively reserved for the regular army units." Eventually, the militia was entitled to purchase the less powerful muzzle-loading Mauser rifles.[55] Under such political circumstances, the militia forces normally had no legal channels to obtain state-of-the-art weapons, but adopting traditional arms or outdated surplus guns of foreign-style, as we have seen in many cases.

V. CONCLUSION

In 1910, two years before the fall of the Qing dynasty, the government promulgated the new version of the criminal law, which, unlike the Great Qing Code, loosened the state's grip on private firearms, proposing that any ordinary individuals were permitted to own either bird guns or foreign guns for self-defense purpose as long as they had their weapons registered. This article examines the manifold ways in which the Qing state was gradually impotent to maintain the monopoly of violence and made an adjustment to the new social and political situation. As the whole country was plagued by civil disorder, the existence of armed populace, in the eyes of the state, constituted an extension of state power in local society, as long as their activities could not challenge state authority. Through an overview of the history of gun control policy during the Qing dynasty, this article illustrates that the Qing's authoritarian rule, under which the monarch exercised disciplinary power and empowered ordinary people to defend themselves were inseparable aspects of the state's social control mechanism. As we have seen, the state did not jealously defend its exclusive monopoly on the production and possession of certain types of arms, which were officially defined as civilian weap-

54 Chen Baochen, et al., *Dezong jinghuangdi shilu* (Veritable Records of the Guangxu emperor) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), vol. 44, 504.

55 "Qingling houtang kuaiqiang buzhun (Rejection on the purchasing quick guns)," *Dagongao* (Imperial Daily), October 31, 1909.

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ons. Maintenance of effective monopoly on the most lethal weapons through enforcement of the law against private possession of military weapons and reliance on the armed populace for local defense were crucial to the imperial state's control over its territory. However, "civilian weapon" was not a fixed concept. For example, alarmed by the bird gun's potential to impair central authority, the Qianlong emperor believed that it was imperative to strengthen the regulations regarding bird gun's use and circulation. During the late Qing, carrying a private firearm was once again allowed to defend localities, but under strict surveillance. This paper argues that the Qing's policy on private weapons was determined by the stance between two ideologies: the resolute maintenance of their monopoly over violence, and the reliance on social power to defend the localities. Therefore, the state's stance over the armed populace was by no means stationary but a dynamic process, which was contingent on the social situation and political deliberation.

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